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Transcript of excerpts from the Russian documentary program “How it Happened” (VID January 30, 2001), ORT (Russian Television Channel 1) with four submarine commanders who participated in Operation Anadyr.

Anchor: Were you surprised when you got the orders to take nuclear weapons with you?

Ryurik Ketov: Yes, in fact we were. Those special, as they were called, weapons were loaded onto the submarine in conditions of triple secrecy approximately a week before our departure. [October 1, 1962 from Kola Bay, near Murmansk]

Anchor: Did you get any instructions as to the situations in which you could use those weapons?

Ketov: No, we did not get any [written] orders, nothing at all about the special weapons. The only person who talked to us about those weapons was Vice-Admiral Rassokho. He said: “Write down when you should use these ... in three cases. First, if you get a hole under the water. A hole in your hull. [meaning if they were attacked and hit under the water—Trans.] That is the first case. Second, a hole above the water. If you have to come to the surface, and they shoot at you, and you get a hole in your hull. And the third case—when Moscow orders you to use these weapons.” These were our instructions. And then he added: “I suggest to you, commanders, that you use the nuclear weapons first, and then you will figure out what to do after that.” This is what I personally heard from Admiral Anatoly Rassokho.

[Sitting next to Ketov is Brigade Commander Vitaly Agafonov, who nods in agreement with Ketov’s statement]
[....]

Anchor: I would like to return you to that night of 25 October 1962. You received instructions to start a continuous communication session. What did that mean?

Nikolai Shumkov: It meant that the submarine had to be at periscope depth, both periscopes should be up, the antennas should be extended and the station of hydro-acoustic location should be in should be working constantly.

Anchor: So, you had that order. You had malfunctioning equipment. You surfaced and your submarine “B-130” found itself squeezed into a box by the American destroyers. What were your actions, Captain?

Shumkov: My actions ... When I discovered the approaching destroyers, I realized we had to submerge. I began submerging, the boat submerged to a depth of approximately 20 meters. At that moment one of the destroyers passed right above me and we heard the first grenade explode [depth charge—Trans.]. We heard the explosion. At first, we did not know that it was a grenade, we just heard the explosion. I received reports from sections of the submarine – “explosion on the right.” We heard the noise of the propeller right over our submarine – that meant that the ship was moving right above us. At 160

meters I received a report that there was a water leak in the 6th block. There are two options in a situation like this. You either have to urgently come to the surface and ventilate, or you can fix the leak. And you just have to wait. And that one minute that I was waiting for the report felt like a whole hour, until the report came. A minute-and-a-half later I received a report from the 6th block that the leak was fixed. But the situation was very difficult. I was blocked by the American destroyers on all sides. I had to make a decision very fast. So, I decided to try an escape. I turned around, the move which is called circulation, and created a hydro-acoustic noise by the movement of the boat. And behind that noisy wall of water, I began to maneuver to escape from the ships. I made my maneuver toward the American shores. Apparently, the American ships expected me to move in the opposite direction, toward our shores. They began the search for my submarine in the direction of our shores.

Anchor: Did you inform the Center about your decision?

Shumkov: Yes, but only after I came to the surface again.

Anchor: How did Moscow react to your information?

Shumkov: Moscow reacted approximately four hours later. I received a communication saying that a rescue ship had been dispatched to my submarine. I reported that all diesel engines had shut down and the accumulator battery was fully discharged.

[...]

Anchor: Submarine "B-59" under the command of captain Valentin Savitsky probably was in the most difficult situation. Vitaly Naumovich [Agafonov], when Savitsky's submarine had to surface one mile from the aircraft carrier "Randolph" and right next to the destroyer "Berry," the submarine, which was locked into this iron box still managed to escape. And it did it in quite an original way. Do you remember?

Vitaly Agafonov: Yes. Despite the fact that they were in the most difficult situation, the commander and the chief of staff used an interesting maneuver, acting as if they were going to destroy especially sensitive documents. They released a box that looked like a box with documents (the box contained some old issues of the Northern Fleet daily bulletin and several books of Russian classics). The Americans reacted to this maneuver, and by the time they realized that their attention had been distracted, the submarine captain had already managed to carry out a fast circular maneuver and managed to escape [the pursuers].

[...]

[**Alexei Dubivko** repeats his claim that his submarine was attacked by a torpedo, which passed about 1.5 meters from the hull and destroyed the main antenna ("it was cut off, as if with a knife").]

[....]

Anchor: Did you have any contact with the center in the last days of October? If you did, did you ever receive an official order that the operation was over?

Ketov: No. We did not receive any reports about the situation and we never received an order saying that the operation was over. Instead, we received all kinds of reports about the harvesting campaign back home.

Ketov: [speaking about one of the communication sessions] The Moscow contact insisted that we come up for a special communication session. After several requests we had to do it, but Moscow apparently did not take into account the time difference. It was the middle of the night in Moscow and it was daytime in the Atlantic, especially in the Sargasso Sea. The Sargasso Sea is the lightest (most transparent) Sea.

[....]

[Upon their return to the Soviet Union, Deputy Defense Minister Grechko had harsh words for the commanders. The commanders were summoned to Moscow from vacation. They waited a month to have an audience with Khrushchev.]

Ketov: Grechko greeted us with words that we were scoundrels and how could we have undermined the prestige of the Soviet Union like this with our illiterate actions [meaning the fact that the submarines had to come to the surface and were discovered]. Four of us, Second Captains, had to face the Defense Council of the country face-to-face. We had to answer questions from 9 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock in the evening, and some of the questions were like the following. One of the Marshals asked us, when we surfaced, how close did the American ships come to us? And I said: "50 meters." And the Marshal asked: "Why didn't you just blast them with grenades then?" Grechko himself was so outraged that he took his glasses and smashed them against the table and broke them to pieces.[...]

Agafonov: I think that the problem was that for some reason Grechko was under the impression that the submarines that were engaged in the operation were not diesel submarines, but nuclear powered submarines. When he found out that he was either misinformed or did not understand that these were diesel submarines, he quickly lost interest in that session and closed it down. His final words to the submarine commanders were: "If I were in your situation I would have chosen to sink [to go down]."

[....]

[At the end of the tape, there is a discussion of some mystery--why the commanders were not given a chance to meet with Castro when he visited the base in 1963. The commanders imply that Castro could have been misled into thinking that the submarines that went to Cuba were nuclear-powered missile submarines, not diesel subs. He was

only shown the nuclear powered submarine on his visit, although they spoke about the submarines that went to Cuba.—Trans.]

Agafonov: Why they did not allow us to meet with Fidel Castro still remains a big unsolved mystery to me. At that time we were preparing to greet Fidel Castro on our base as the hero of the Freedom Island. All the submarines at the base were lined up near the dock. The first submarine in the row was the bigger submarine, the nuclear-powered missile submarine. That submarine did not go to Cuba. Right behind that submarine was Dubivko's submarine, but you could not see it behind that big submarine. Dubivko spent several hours waiting for Fidel Castro to come to his submarine and he is still waiting to meet with him today. However, Castro never stepped onto his submarine. Many photographs were taken and published which showed Castro on the missile submarine with captions saying Fidel Castro is visiting the submarine that went to Cuba's shores. Even if you look at my article on operation Anadyr, you can see one of those pictures there -- Fidel Castro visiting the submarine that defended the Cuban revolution.

[Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, the National Security Archive.]